



MALE

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APPE MAN

EVERYONE WAS SHOUTING FOR ME TO GET UP SO THEY COULD SEE ME GET KNOCKED DOWN AGAIN, BUT I WOULDN'T DO IT.

By Jack Ritchie



I was on the davenport with my eyes closed and the comic books scattered around, some of them on the floor and some on my chest. I breathed deeply and wondered idly whether I should try snoring. They might get a kick out of that.

"I guess the heavy reading wore out Brute's brain," Harry said.

Harry Whitman earned his living writing a daily sports column for the *Courier*. I heard the cards being riffled and I slitted my eyes open just enough to see.

Max Kaminski, my manager, was looking at his drink with a sour expression on his face and Ed Weaver of the *Journal* had his jaws working on a wad of gum.

"I got it now," Harry said, snapping his

fingers. "Prognathous. Yep, that's what it is."

Ed Weaver raised a bored eyebrow. "Explain it to me."

"Prognathous," Harry said. "His jaw sticks out. Like an ape's."

A heavy jaw, yes, I thought tiredly. Possibly mesognathous, but definitely not prognathous.

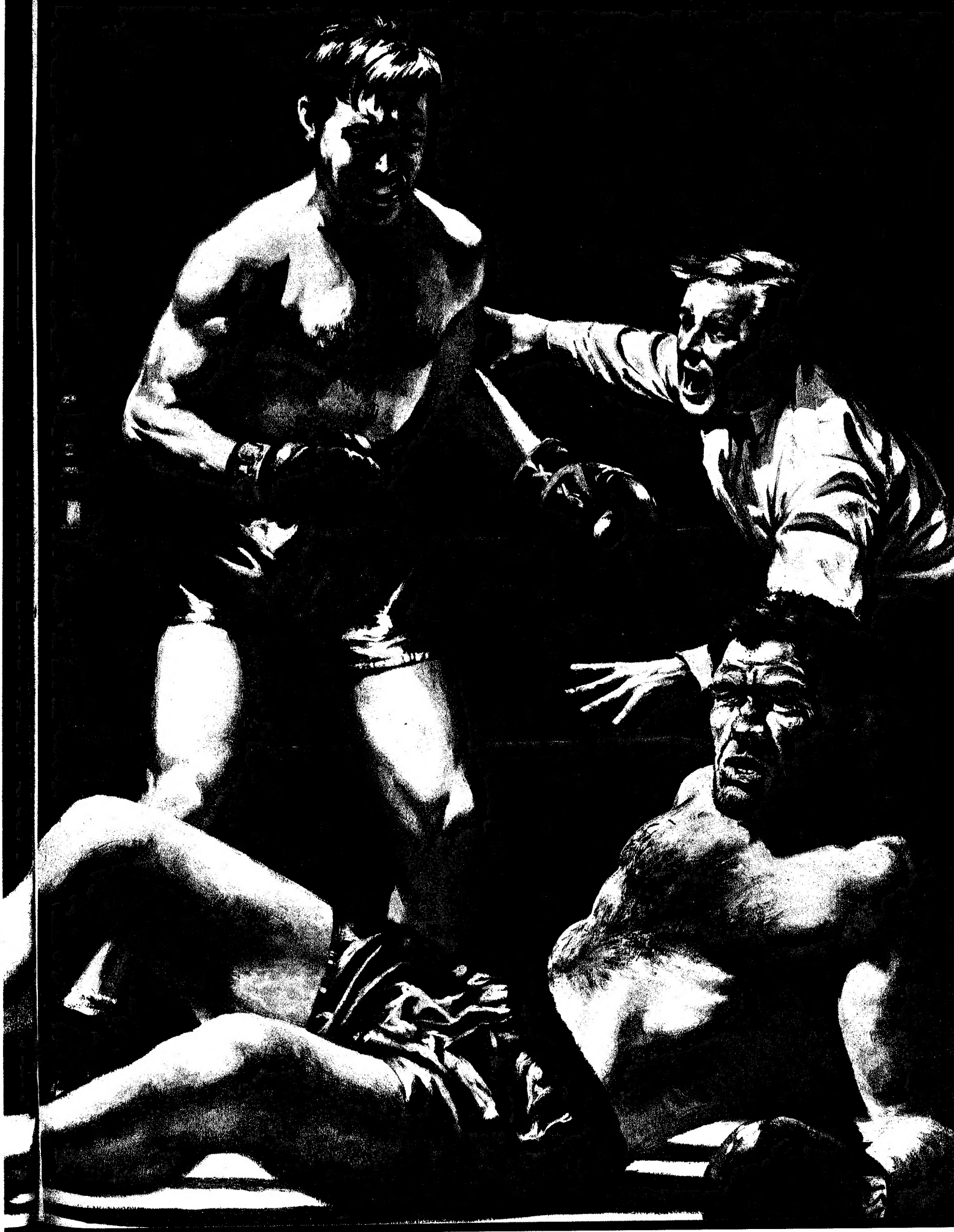
"One of these days he'll understand you when you make those cracks," Ed said. "You're liable to lose your pearly whites."

Harry had a high laugh and I wondered how fast it would stop if I suddenly got up and grabbed him by the collar.

"The whiskey is gone now, boys," Max said. "When are you leaving?"

"Once more around," Ed said. He looked at me. "You got to (*Continued on page 70*)

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Ape Man

Continued from page 28

admit he's not pretty. You getting used to him, Max?"

Harry's chair creaked as he crossed his legs and lounged back. "Should we wake the beast and get his statement on the fight tonight?"

"Make up your own," Max said. "You know how to do it."

"If this kid Barlow uses his head and keeps in close, he might get the decision," Ed said.

"There won't be any decision," Max said. "Brute will get to him in less than six."

I stretched, yawned, and sat up. I watched Harry deal off and then he and Ed got to their feet.

"What round is it gonna be, Brute?" Harry asked.

"When Max tells me," I said.

After they left, Max got out his box of bicarbonate. "Sometimes I think you're making a mistake," he said. "Look at the publicity Tunney got for knowing how to read and write."

"He looked the part," I said. "And I don't. What I have between my ears is my own business and I want to keep it that way."

MAX is a short man carrying around weight that would look better on someone six inches taller. "When they look at your eyes they ought to know," he said. "The sparkle of a good brain is there." He braced himself as he looked at the glass in his hand. "Don't they ever get you sore?"

I slipped into my coat. "I'm going out for some fresh air and more comic books," I said.

Max finished his glass. "Do you ever really read those things?"

"Sure," I said. "I'm crazy about Superman."

Downstairs I hesitated a moment before going out into the streets. I didn't like going out there to be stared at, but I couldn't stay in the hotel room all day either. After a few hours, the place always seemed like a cage to me.

I walked slowly, trying to concentrate on the fresh air and sunlight, but the familiar moisture formed on my palms as I saw the disbelief in the faces of the people I passed, or the shock, or the suppressed smirks.

I went about six blocks when I saw the library. I halted at the bottom of the stairs, toying with the idea of going in. Back home the librarians were used to me, though they still kept their distance, but this was a strange city.

I was about to move on when two high school girls came out. Their eyes

widened as they saw me and I could almost hear sighs of relief once they were safely past me.

They glanced back over their shoulders to make sure they had been right and I felt the anger getting me again. I wanted to run. To run someplace where I could be alone and where there were no eyes to look at me.

But you can't, I thought, shaking myself out of it. At least not yet. I stared at the library and made up my mind to go in.

I wandered along the stacks, sampling a volume here and there. Gradually the quiet worked on me and I could feel the tenseness seeping out. I turned down one aisle and was half way down when I realized that it was a little too shadowy to see the titles. I turned back and started for the light switch.

The slim silhouette of a girl appeared before me and her hand went to the light switch.

We were only a foot or two apart when she snapped on the light. She gasped when she saw me and the books in her arm slipped. I caught them before they dropped to the floor.

The tenseness again frayed on my nerves. "I know it's startling to see me," I said. "But don't scream here. We must have silence at all times." I put the books back in her arms and went back down to the middle of the aisle.

I was conscious of her still standing there. Look all you want, I said to myself, but I'm not going to be chased away by what you think.

In a few seconds I heard her footsteps as she came nearer. She stopped in the section next to me and added one of her books to the shelves.

Brave girl to come so near to me, I thought bitterly. I glanced covertly at her and our eyes met. I noticed that hers were violet and that she had soft, brown hair.

She didn't look away. "I'm sorry about seeming so shocked," she said.

"It's all right."

"It's just that out of the dark..."

"Your apology is accepted," I said. I pulled a book from the row and paged through it. I could feel her eyes still examining me.

"Dogs sometimes bark at me," I said. "But generally children love me for my basic kindness and gentle qualities." I snapped the book shut and put it back. I started leaving, but she put her hand on my arm.

"I'll go," she said. "I didn't mean to disturb you."

I looked at her more carefully. There

was a peculiar seriousness to her expression and there was no fear.

"I was only browsing," I said. "I couldn't take out any of them anyway. I don't have a library card."

"I'm one of the librarians here," she said. "If you will come to the desk I'll see that you're issued one."

I studied her face for a hint of mockery and then I said, "All right. Let's get me a card." I followed her to the desk. She pulled a blank library card out of a drawer and rolled it into a typewriter.

"Your name, please?" she asked.

"Westwood," I said. "Robert Westwood."

Her head tilted up slightly in disbelief and I knew that she must have seen photographs of me and knew who I was supposed to be.

The tightness returned to the back of my neck and I knew I had to get out of there. "Never mind the card," I said. I walked to the door and turned to look at her.

"Yes," I said. "Robert Westwood is my real name. But if it will give you a laugh, make out the card to Brute Brown and send it to the Queen Hotel."

I left the library and started toward the hotel. Why did I have to let it get me, I thought. By now I should be used to being Brute Brown. I slowed down. Snap out of it. A few thousand more and then you can get your island without people or mirrors.

I rested in the hotel room the rest of the day and around 7:30 Max and I went down to the arena. We got our call at 9 p.m. and walked down the aisle to the ring. The fans stood up and craned their necks to get a good look at me as I passed and in the safety of their numbers I heard a few giggles.

When the announcer was through with the introductions and the statistics, Barlow and I met in the center of the ring for instructions and I looked him over again. He was about my age and I wondered what it must feel like to be a clean-cut kid with blue eyes.

Barlow had a string of 21 wins; he was one of the best fighters around. But looking at him now I felt the sickness in my stomach when I saw that he was scared. He avoided my eyes and one foot moved nervously back and forth on the canvas.

THAT'S how I get almost all of them, I thought wearily. They come in here scared silly. They've heard about me and they've seen pictures of me and they've met me at the weigh-in and for the photographers. But now that we're in the ring everything is different. Nothing their managers told them makes them ready to fight.

You're as strong as he is, kid, and a lot faster, they told him. All this ape stuff is just publicity. They had a doc fix up his face to make him look that way, kid. He was never pretty to begin with, but he's human, kid. Human.

I listened dully to the referee and then went back to my corner for the bell. When it rang I had to go three-quarters of the way across the ring to get to Barlow.

Barlow was known for smiling slightly



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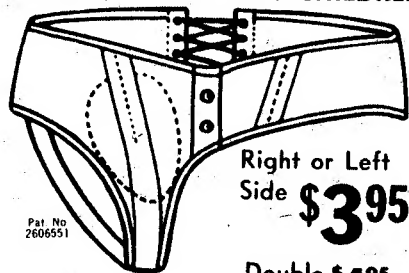
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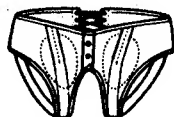
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when he fought, but the smile wasn't there now. His face was unnaturally white and his movements stiff and awkward. I could see that he was wondering how it was going to feel to be knocked out for the first time. He was wondering how bad a beating he was going to have to take before that happened.

I could do it right now, I thought. I could crowd him into that corner and it would all be over in a few seconds.

Barlow grabbed and held as I came in and as I leaned on him and waited for the referee to part us, I suddenly wondered why I had to win. Suppose I lost this one and then a few more. I looked out at the crowd. They'd still come, all those people. And that was really why they were here in the first place. They wanted to see me beaten to the floor.

Barlow fell into another clinch and after we were parted I threw out a few light lefts, just stiff enough to sting him. It was a dull first round and at the bell they booted both of us.

We came out for the second and I noticed that Barlow's movements were more fluid. He was still cautious and he covered up and clinched whenever he thought I might do some damage, but he was gaining some confidence.

I kept my left in his face when I could, but I wasn't doing him any harm. Defensively I reacted automatically to the few punches he threw, almost lulled by the steady crowd noises. It was only an occasional loud ringside voice that woke me from my daze.

With ten seconds left in the round, Barlow's long left snaked out and caught me on the side of the head. It brought the crowd to its feet but I held until the bell sounded.

In my corner, Max handed me the bottle. "If you really want to go to sleep so much, I can get you a pillow."

Barlow came out for the third with a faint smile on his face. He was still alive and functioning after two rounds and it pleasantly surprised him. He was beginning to get the idea that his managers were right.

Experimentally I sent in a harder punch and watched the confidence fade from his eyes. But I didn't press it and as the round wore on, the smile on his face gradually returned.

He began scoring with those long lefts. I didn't mind them much. They stung for a second or two, and then I waited for the next one.

I learned now with drowsy curiosity just when to expect them. First there was the squeak of Barlow's shoe on the rosin, and then the left. Always the squeak and then the left.

At first I mechanically clinched after every one of them, and listened to the delighted noises of the people.

But then I stopped falling into the clinch and I stopped listening for the squeak on the canvas. I just listened to the people. The human beings who paid money for their seats and the more money they paid the closer they could get.

In my corner at the end of the round I stared numbly at my shoes.

"Brute," Max said. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing. Everything is fine with Brute. The Brute is feeling fine."

I waited until the gong before I got off my stool. Barlow met me in the center of the ring. The smile was permanent now. He wasn't afraid and he knew he was going to win. He was going to beat me to a pulp and he wasn't going to mind at all.

The lefts were there again, but now he was using his right too. A left, and when I dropped my hands, the right. But they weren't hurting me any more and I wanted them to be harder.

And suddenly the roar of the crowd woke me and I found myself sitting on the canvas. I was faintly surprised as I sat there watching the ringsiders with their distorted faces and their bright, satisfied eyes.

I closed my eyes and waited for the count. I could get up, but I wasn't going to. I was tired. So much more tired than I had ever been in my life.

But the referee wasn't counting and I opened my eyes to see why. Barlow was still standing over me, with the referee tugging at his arm.

Barlow's lips were moving as he looked down at me. They seemed to be twisting out the words. "Get up, Ape Man. So I can knock you right down again, Ape Man."

The referee got Barlow to a neutral corner and he began counting over me. I looked back at the ringsiders and they seemed to be saying it too. "Get up, Ape Man. Get up, Ape Man."

"Get up, Ape man. We don't want it this easy. Get up, Ape Man, so that you can be cut to ribbons. Once more. At least once more."

The redness of hate came to my eyes and the Ape Man got up. He stood there and waited for Barlow. He waited for Barlow and all the people in the world. He waited until they were all close enough and then he struck.

The surprise in Barlow's eyes was glazed in the thin slice of a second and he collapsed to the canvas.

THE crowd's roar died and there was the murmur of shock and disappointment. The Ape Man turned and looked directly into the television cameras. How many people are looking at you right now, Brute, he asked himself. How many millions of people who are disappointed.

Max and I got back to the hotel at 11 P.M. and a blonde in chinchilla waited outside the doors of our room. She came up to me and ran her hands along my shoulders and down my arms. Her eyes glowed with eager intensity. "Magnificent," she said. "Magnificent Brute."

I said nothing as I watched the quick way she breathed.

"Brute," she said. "Come downstairs with me. Just one drink, Brute. Please, Brute."

"Maybe," I said. "Maybe later."

"You will?" she said, her tongue darting nervously over sharp white teeth. "You will, Brute?"

"I'll see," I said.

I followed Max into the room and he locked the door. I went to the davenport and sat down.

"Are you?" Max asked. "You saw her eyes, didn't you?"

I looked at him. "Max," I said. "How many women chase after me? Any kind of women?"

Max went to the suitcases and brought out a bottle. He poured himself a drink.

"Would it help if I drink, Max?" I asked. "Will it make me happy?"

"I don't know," Max said. He stared at his drink and then swallowed it.

I went over to the bed and lay down. "I'm going to try to sleep now, Max," I said. "It's either sleep or I go downstairs."

I closed my eyes and began hoping for sleep. For a long, long sleep that would never end.

And it was a long sleep, but not long enough. I woke up at 11 the next morning. I went to the bathroom and washed and shaved and then I came back and looked out of the window.

It was a clear bright day with tufts of clouds moving slowly in the blue sky. It was the kind of a morning when you should want to live. It was a day of sunlight when you take your girl to a picnic.

I opened the window and felt the air moving past my face. It was fresh and clean with the smell of life.

And then I looked down.

I looked down nine stories and there they were. People moving about on foot and in their cars and their buses. The good, kind people who could walk the streets without frightening anyone.

I heard the door open behind me. Max said quietly, "Brute."

Just a little push with my toes, I thought. That's all it takes and then no more Brute.

Max spoke again. "Bob," he said.

I stared down for half a minute more and then I shut the window. "Thanks," I said.

Max stood in the middle of the room, his brown eyes watching me.

"Max," I said. "I'm through. I'm quitting."

"I could see it," Max said.

"I'm sorry, Max. I hate to run out on you after you brought me this far, but I can't take any more. You'll be out money, Max."

Max kept his eyes on the cigar he was unwrapping. "The hell with the money. A man's heart is more important."

"I'll write you post cards when the mail boat comes to my island," I said. "If you want them."

"I want them," Max said. He took an envelope out of his pocket. "This was left at the desk this morning, Bob."

It was a plain envelope with no address on it. I fingered the paper and inside I felt an oblong piece of cardboard. I felt suddenly afraid and my fingers began to tremble. I tore the envelope open and let the cardboard slide out.

I held it for a moment and then I turned it over. It was a library card made out in the name of Robert Westwood.

I looked at the printing of my name until it became blurred to me. After a while I noticed that Max was still watching me.

"Haven't you got something else to look at, Max?" I said.

I went to the closet and got my coat.

Max looked worried. "You still haven't got any bad ideas, have you?"

"No, Max," I said.

She was at the desk when I walked into the library and she smiled as I came toward her.

"Thanks for delivering the card," I said. From where I stood I could smell the perfume she was wearing.

"Did you see the fight last night?" I asked.

"No," she said.

"Did you want to?"

"No."

"It was my last one," I said. "Now I'm going to buy an island and live there."

SHE considered me for a moment. "Do you have to?" she asked.

The bitterness hovered over me again.

"Look at me once more," I said.

Her eyes went over my battered face.

"Do you really have to?"

"Yes," I said. "I really have to." I

looked carefully at her upturned face.

"I'll take out some books now," I said.

"And I'll come back."

"Yes," she said, her eyes still on my face.

I had trouble saying it. "Do you know what I mean? I'll be back."

"Yes," she said. "I know."

She smiled again and I looked into her violet eyes. They were eyes that saw something no other woman had ever seen in me. She was looking at a man. ***

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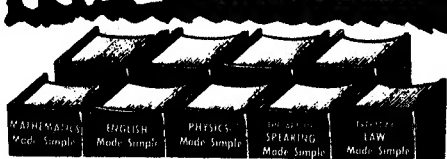
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